



# Beef Showmanship

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*Showmanship is more than entering the show arena during the fair or livestock show. It includes all the hard work that exhibitors put into their project from the first day they purchase their animal. Showmanship is defined as the ability to present your animal to the best of its genetic ability and involves knowing the basic skills of the show ring, while bringing attention to the animal's strengths and minimizing the animal's weaknesses. Many factors enter into the equation for a successful showman, including halter breaking, nutrition, time at home, skill of the showman, and daily care and grooming. All the hard work done throughout the project will be worthwhile on show day.*

## Show Ring Success Begins at Home

Successful showmen start early. As soon as you purchase an animal or two weeks after weaning, it is important that your animal begins to build trust with you as you begin the halter breaking process. This is safer and less stressful for you and your calf and will ensure that your animal is ready for the show. Spend time with your animal to get the calf use to you. A good way to do this is during feeding. Just sit or stand in the pen while your animal eats. Remember that this process takes patience and time.

Start halter breaking early. There are numerous opinions and appropriate means to halter breaking a calf. While this fact sheet will familiarize you with some of the helpful basics, familiarize yourself with successful halter breaking methods.

Here are some helpful hints to assist the initial gentling and halter breaking process:

- Place the calf in a small pen, where it can become familiar with you. In the small pen environment, it may be helpful to use a long stick with a brush on it to help gentle the calf.
- Nylon rope halters 1/2- to 5/8-inch in diameter work best, are generally the easiest for people to use, and minimize stress of the animal.
- Adjust the halter so the nose piece is about 2 inches below the eye.
- Tie the calf to a sturdy place at their chin height with minimal halter length to minimize the amount of force they have to pull back. This reduces the chances of the animal getting tangled in the rope or a broken halter. While the calf is tied up (for no longer than 15 to 20 minutes), brush the calf and talk to them, allowing the calf to get use to you. Never leave a tied animal unattended! Playing a radio will allow the calf to get use to noises and human voices and also helps calm the animal.
- The first few times you lead the calf, lead them in a place they want to go such as to feed or water. Voice rewards are very important and allows the animal to become more comfortable with you.
- Use a small pen to prevent the calf from escaping the handler while leading for the first few times. Gradually move to larger pens as your calf is leading better.

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- When releasing an animal, never let them get away from you. Once an animal gets away they think they can repeatedly do it. Stay calm without jerking the halter away.
- Practice makes perfect—introduce your animal to the show stick and show halter well in advance of your show. Your animal needs to be trained how to set its feet properly and walk with a show halter. Have another person handle your calf while you hold the halter so the animal learns to remain calm under the judge's close evaluation.

## Leading Your Calf and Using the Halter

The halter should be properly placed on the calf's head with the lead strap on the calf's left side. The halter strap that crosses over the muzzle or nose should be between the eyes and nose (Figure 1). Rope halters and show halters can be adjusted for proper fit. If the halter is too small, it will get into the calf's eyes. If the halter is too big, the nose cross piece will be down too close to the mouth.

You must use a nose lead to break and show bulls. This provides better control and increased safety for you and other exhibitors. Handle the nose lead just like the halter, providing equal pressure on both.

When leading, you should be on the calf's left side with the halter in your right hand. Your hand should be knuckle-side up with your smallest finger nearest the calf, three to six inches from the animal's head. With show halters, this is usually at the chain, so wrapping the chain with vet wrap might be helpful for a younger showman. When stopped with an animal, place your hand so your thumb is in the air (shown in Figure 1). Your wrist is stronger this way and provides greater control of the animal.

The strap length should be enough for control but not long enough to touch the ground. If the strap of the show halter can touch the ground, you or the calf may step on it. Any extra strap may be cut off. If the calf is spooked, you should have two hands on the strap. Never wrap the halter strap around your hand or fingers because this could cause serious injury.



**Figure 1. Proper placement and fit of show halter.**

By the time you arrive at the show, your calf should already be trained to lead and stand correctly. Observe where you are going in the show ring and occasionally look back to see if your calf is walking in a straight path. Walk at a moderate pace and straight ahead with the calf's head even at your side. During the lead, the calf's head should be just high enough to present an impressive style, attractive side view, and graceful walk. Let your calf walk out freely and naturally, not too fast or too slow. Be aware of the animal in front of you, and do not get too close at the walk or when setting up for a side view. Be observant for signals and instructions from the judge and the ring official. When leading your calf in a circle, move in a clockwise direction, putting your animal between you and the judge. One of the key points in showmanship is never to obstruct the judge's view.

## Setting up Your Calf

Set your calf up gently and carefully each time it is moved to a new position. When you pull your calf into the line-up (side by side), always allow about three to four feet of space between your calf and the calf next to you. Do not crowd. This same distance should be maintained when lining up head to tail, also called a side profile. Proper distancing allows for a better view and aids the judge in viewing and handling your calf. On a side profile, set up in a straight line head to tail. If you are blocking the view of another animal and have space, move so the judge can see all the animals. If you are the one being covered up, it is your responsibility to get where the judge can see your animal. If you cannot get back into your previous spot because it is too small, pull to the end of the line so you can be seen. As the judge pulls cattle from the line-up, move forward into the empty space and continue to set your calf.

Before setting up your calf, transfer the lead strap to your left hand and the show stick to your right hand. It will take considerable practice to develop smooth and coordinated techniques in stopping your calf at the desired point, transferring the lead strap and show stick, and turning and facing toward the rear of the calf. The proper and easiest way to stop your animal is to "walk your animal into it," or walk your animal into the proper set up position. Even having only one foot out of place is better than resetting each leg.

While your calf is set up and the judge is appraising your animal, he or she could walk around your animal. It is important you are aware the judge is coming. If the judge comes from the right side of your animal around the front of the animal's head, when the judge comes even with you, shift your weight on your left foot taking one small step, and turn to look over your right shoulder as the judge walks past. This allows the judge to see more of your animal and lets them know you are aware of their location. Move the opposite way if the judge comes from the opposite direction. Continue scratching your animal the entire time.

## The Comb or Cloth

The scotch comb is used to groom the hair that may become messed up while in the show ring.

The scotch comb should be carried in your back pocket, or in a scotch comb sheath with the teeth toward you. If the teeth face outwards, your calf could get spooked and hit the comb, causing the calf to become even more scared and spooked if poked.

If showing American breeds with short hair, carry a wipe cloth and use it in the same manner as a comb.

Sometimes the judge will handle your animal. In this case, once the judge has moved to the next animal, naturally place your show stick in your left hand, use your right hand to grab your comb, and comb the spot the judge has touched. Often, the judge

will look back over his or her shoulder once they have moved to the next animal to see if you properly combed your animal.

## Special Term

**Setting up an animal:** A showmanship term referring to using a show stick with a haltered beef animal being exhibited to a judge for evaluation. The stick moves the legs to the proper position under the animal so that the animal is presented at its best appearance from the side, front, or rear views.

## The Showstick

The showstick becomes very helpful while showing beef cattle. There are five basic uses for the showstick:

- assist in placing the feet
- calm the animal
- control the animal
- keep the top straight
- scotch-drive

Slowly scratch your calf's belly or brisket a couple of times to help calm your animal. Never "saw" your animal, or scratch hard on your calf. This will not calm them, but make them become scared. After scratching the animal, set the feet in the appropriate position. Remember, you have three tools to set the feet: the halter, your feet, and your showstick. If you want a rear foot to be moved back, push backward on the halter and press (do not jab) the soft tissue where the hoof is split with your showstick. If you want a rear foot to move forward, pull forward on the halter and apply pressure with your showstick under the dew claw. Remember it is easier for the animal to move a foot back than move a foot forward. When the rear feet are too close together apply pressure to the inside of the leg just above the hoof, and they should stand wider. Front feet can be moved by using your boot or showstick to apply pressure in the previously mentioned areas while pushing or pulling with the halter in the desired direction you want the foot to move. Younger, less experienced showmen usually use the showstick as it might be easier.

Placement of the feet depends on what view is provided to the judge and what makes the animal look its best. When the cattle are lined up side by side, in a straight line, the feet should be set at all four corners under the animal, each bearing their full share of the animal's weight. At this view, the judge is looking at the rear and front of the animal.

When the cattle are lined up in a side profile or head to tail, the feet should be set as if a professional photographer is taking a picture (Figure 2). The rear feet should be staggered so that the far side foot is slightly in front of the foot closest to the judge. Usually a heel-to-toe relationship works best. That means the heel of the one foot is parallel with the toe of the other foot. The front feet should be set square or staggered less than the rear



**Figure 2. Side profile view. Notice the front feet are set even and the back feet are staggered.**

feet. The toe of the front foot opposite the judge should be set back half the width of the hoof on the judges side. By setting the feet in this manner, the judge can look at the length and balance of body, smoothness of the front end, and in heifers, the udder development. It also makes it easier to correct a topline and rump structure.

The showstick can also be used to correct the topline. If the top is weak and needs to be raised, apply pressure at the naval or the flank with the hook of the showstick. If the rump is steep and the loin is high, apply pressure to this area to bring it down. Then, continue to scratch the animal's belly lightly to keep it calm but not allow the loin to come back up.

The showstick can also be used to help control your calf while walking. While walking, the showstick is in your left hand at the handle or about one-third of the way down with the point always toward the ground for safety and professional appearance. This will allow use of the showstick as an additional control tool if needed. If the animal is moving too fast, use the portion of the stick between your left hand and tip or hook end for slowing the calf down. Never hit or beat, merely place the stick in front of the nose.

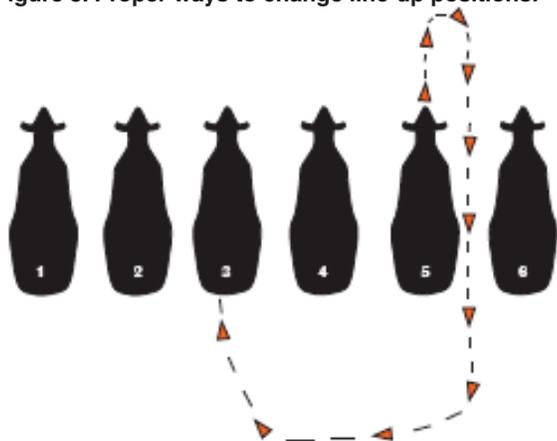
"Scotch-driving" is when your calf will not lead or walk and no one is around to help you get started. If this happens, push

forward on the halter with your right hand and turn to your left to tap the animal with the showstick on its side or rump. This will make the animal think someone is behind it and the calf should start to walk. If this does not walk, be patient for someone to come assist you.

## Courtesy and Efficiency in the Show Ring

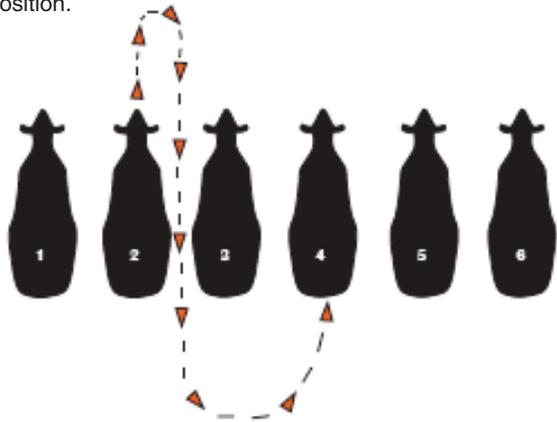
You may need to turn your animal because it moves or because the judge asks you to move or trade places with another calf. When pulling out of a line-up, always pull your calf forward out of the line-up and then turn to the right (clockwise), pushing over your calf's nose. Come back through the same spot you were in to come out of the line-up. Avoid rubbing against or knocking another calf to preserve their grooming efforts and to prevent them from moving. Make a big circle with your animal; again remember to turn over the nose. Put your animal back in

Figure 3. Proper ways to change line-up positions.



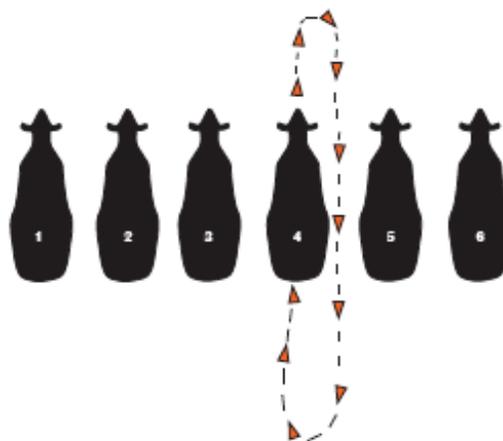
### 1. How to switch from position 5 to 3:

If you are animal 5, pull forward, turn to the right, come back through the same position you were in, make a big circle out and to the left, turn to your right, and finally pull into your new position.



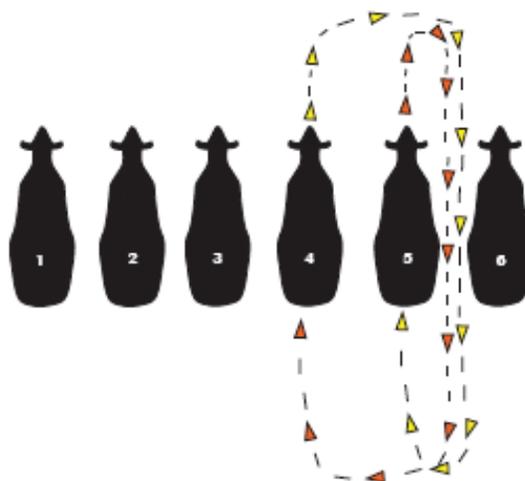
### 2. How to switch from position 2 to 4:

If you are animal 2, pull forward, turn to the right, come back through the same position you were in, make a big circle out and to the right, turn to your left, and finally pull into your new position.



### 3. How to reset 4 into the same position:

If you are animal 4 and you must reset in the same position, pull forward, turn to the right, come back through the same position you were in, make a big circle out and to the left, turn to your right, and pull back into the same position.



### 4. How to switch positions 4 and 5:

Animal 5 should move first. In that case, animal 5 should pull forward, turn to the right, come back through the same position you were in, make a big circle out and to the left, turn to the right and finally pull into your new position 4. Animal 4 should turn to the right, but this is the only case where the animal would not come back through the old position. Instead, animal 4 will follow animal 5, going to position 5 the same way as before.

the same spot in line or in the place the judge has instructed for you to go (Figure 3).

Your animal will know when to stop and set up by training you have taught it at home. When coming to a stop, slow down, lift up slightly on the halter and watch for the proper feet placement. Then, stop your animal.

When the judge handles your calf, be sure you have a firm grasp of the halter. Calves that are nervous might jump and pull the lead strap out of your hand. It is good to tell the judge if your animal kicks or does not like to be touched.

If the calf becomes restless, do not fight it. Work gently and to the best of your ability to get it to move and stand well. Scratching the animal with the show stick will help to calm the calf. An exhibitor losing his temper with a restless calf will only make things worse, and he/she will go away from the show ring with a terrible feeling of frustration.

When showing, do not shake the lead strap and chain unnecessarily; do not try to stare the judge down or make a large amount of body motion. Be natural, calm, relaxed, and confident and your calf will share your confidence.

Always be aware of the judge's location; however, do not concentrate on the judge so much that you forget about your animal and the animals around you. Your first obligation is to your calf, so keep checking to see that it is standing correctly and in the proper position. Be ready to move if the judge signals, or answer any questions about your calf, such as age, sire, dam, pregnancy status, feeding program, yield grade, quality grade, retail cuts of beef, or weight gain.

Courtesy in the show ring will go a long way in keeping the showing moving efficiently and maintaining a friendly environment. Do everything you can to help others when possible. If a calf stops in front of you, shift your show stick to your right hand and twist the tail of the animal in front of you with your left hand.

### Special Term

**Good Sportsmanship:** Occurs when opponents, show team members, officials and anyone else are treated with respect by livestock exhibitors. Good sportsmanship is practicing etiquette at all times within the show ring. The real winners are those who know how to persevere and to behave with dignity-- whether they win or lose a show.

### Appearance

The animal should be clean, well-groomed, and clipped in those areas as acceptable or recognized for the breed or sex. The hair on the body should be trained in an upward position. A good grooming job exemplifies pride of ownership by the exhibitor. The many hours spent brushing and training the hair in advance of the show will be evident in the show ring.

You should be neat and clean just as the calf should be well groomed. Remember, the audience looks at you too. Fancy clothes are not necessary, but neatness and cleanliness are important. It is recommended that you wear appropriate clothing consisting of a tucked-in sleeved shirt, leather boots, jeans and a belt. Avoid faded blue jeans and T-shirts. Instead, a more professional look is better. Check the show regulations concerning dress code and always comply with the requirements, such as wearing specific clothing.

Practice good posture in showmanship because it is the proper thing to do and will keep your calf calm. Stand with your

back straight. Never lean back. If you must lean, lean slightly forward as this expresses a positive interest of concern, as if you were getting into a good action movie and were leaning forward. When your animal is stopped, always scratch your animal with a long, calm stroke of the showstick. A fast stroke only shows that you're nervous and can make your calf nervous also, defeating the purpose of the showstick.

### Show Time!

When you arrive at the show, check the show ring for low spots or dark areas. This will help you avoid these areas when setting up your calf, both improving the appearance of your animal and impressing the showmanship judge. If possible, every time you stop your animal, position the front legs on slightly higher ground and in a well lit area.

Be sure to know the show schedule and be ready when the class is called. A late arrival in the show ring may cause some confusion or distract the judge. It is wise to confirm your calf is entered in the correct class. Animals entered in the wrong class cause confusion and slow down the show. If the show requires each exhibitor to have an entry card before entering the ring, make sure you have the card, and any other required record or identification. Observe the judging of a few classes prior to showing to familiarize yourself with ring procedures at each show and the judge's preferred show style.

The first thing to do when entering the show ring is to look for the ring official who is lining up your class. The ring official is there to help organize the class and minimize distractions for the judge. Be alert at all times, and carry out the instructions of the judge and ring officials closely.

One way to practice good sportsmanship is to assist others when you can. For example, if an animal stops in front of you, do not wait for the ring assistant to come help. Instead, place your showstick in your right hand and use your left hand to twist the animal's tail. This will keep the show moving properly and the judge will recognize that you care about the success of others and not just yourself.

When the judge starts his reasons, the class is over, but your job is not. Continue to work hard and display good sportsmanship. Leave the ring in an orderly manner as instructed by the ring steward, and pick up your award.

### Have Fun and Do Your Best

Always be courteous to show officials, the judge, and other exhibitors. Good sportsmanship is an important part of showmanship; therefore, you will win graciously and accept setbacks with dignity. Show your appreciation for the sponsorship of the show by writing thank you notes. Be a good representative of your club, school, county, and family. Work hard, practice before hand, always try to do better next time, and profit from your mistakes as you gain experience.

Above all have fun!

**Showing cattle is a very rewarding experience. Show appreciation to those who have helped you succeed.**



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